



# Voyagers: a larp duet

by Margo Gray

*Voyagers* is a long-distance larp for two that explores connection, the possibility of change, and the power of music. In 1977, NASA launched the Voyager satellites, each containing a golden record with audio greetings from the people of Earth, images of Earth life, and musical selections. These messages were sent in the hope that some traveller might find them. Said the recorded message from the Secretary General of the UN, “We step out of our solar system into the universe... to teach if we are called upon, to be taught if we are fortunate.” You are a scientist who has discovered a small, temporary hole between universes. You have a chance to make contact with a version of yourself from another universe, but the ways in which you can communicate are limited. Using questions and musical selections, you will communicate with your parallel self and try to derive some comfort or wisdom from another life lived.

## PREPARATION

For this game, you will need:

- A two-way communication method to share text and links. This could be a text program (like SMS or WhatsApp), email, or a temporary chat room (such as [Disposable Chat](#) or [Chattory](#)). This will henceforth be known as “The Portal.”
- A notetaking mechanism, paper or electronic. This will henceforth be known as your “Lab Journal.” [A template is available.](#)
- A timer, or access to the [soundtrack](#).
- A method for sending links to musical selections back and forth. Agree on a music delivery method that both players can access (e.g. Youtube links, Spotify links, etc.).
- A musical mindset. You may want to peruse your music library to get a sense of what songs feel particularly meaningful to you at this moment.

## SAFETY MECHANICS

Players should determine subjects that are off limits to bring up during play. The [“lines and veils”](#) method is one way to delineate these topics. You may

also use any additional calibration or safety tools that you find useful. These kinds of tools allow players to avoid subject matter that may be triggering or that they want to avoid for another reason.

## CHARACTER CREATION

The players portray versions of the same character from parallel universes: a scientist who researches interdimensional communication. You have much of your past in common, but four years ago, a significant event took place in each of your universes that changed your course substantially.

### The Early Years: Together (15-20 minutes)

First, both players will discuss what your characters have in common up to the time of the divergence: during this time, your experiences were largely the same. Take turns answering questions about your shared character until you agree you both have a solid understanding of this person. You may want to take notes.

- What are they good at?
- What are they bad at?
- Who was most important to them in their youth?
- What is most important to them now (in the days before the divergence)?
- What did they hope they would do someday?
- What object is particularly important to them?
- Name one painful memory they carry.
- Name one joyful memory they carry.
- What makes them mad?
- What do they do for fun?
- How do they relate to people: Are they an introvert or extrovert? Are they charismatic or awkward? Popular or isolated?
- What are their insecurities?
- What is their proudest accomplishment?
- What disappointments have they faced?
- Propose your own question.

Finally, decide on a name and pronouns for your character. You now know who you were up until the divergence four years ago.

### The Divergence: On Your Own (10-15 minutes)

On your own, each player should decide on a significant event that happened four years ago; this event caused your paths to diverge considerably; you will not share the information you generate in this

section with the other player. Each player should pick a world-altering event that happened in your character's life, but not in your counterpart's. See Appendix A for some ideas for a significant event that could have taken place in your character's timeline.

Next, you'll explore the parallel universes each of you inhabit. It has been four years since the divergence took place. Take about 15 minutes to brainstorm answers to these questions on your own. These are for your information only.

- What happened to change things?
- How did it affect you?
- How did it affect the world around you?
- Is your life better or worse than before the event?
- How do you feel about the event now?
- What is your day-to-day life currently like?
- What problems are you facing?
- What brings you joy?
- What do you wish you'd done differently?
- Who is important in your life now?
- What choices did you make that led you to where you are now?

## HOW TO PLAY

You have recently discovered a temporary opportunity to communicate with a version of yourself that inhabits a parallel universe through a text exchange method you call "The Portal." It is a tenuous link across the void, fragile and uncertain. Years ago you wrote down a list of instructions on what to do if you ever managed to get The Portal to communicate across universes. Luckily, the you that you have contacted has a record of those instructions as well.

Your other self, though they may seem familiar, is still a strange being from another world. Inspired by old tales of the Golden Record, your plan calls for communicating with your other self via music. This will bypass challenges around the precision of language, and give you access to the deeper thoughts and feelings of your counterpart. You also plan to ask them questions, though what these questions are, you have not decided. The window for communication will only be open for 107 minutes, which is, incidentally, the combined length of the audio tracks on the Golden Record. Communicating with another version of yourself may be difficult as well as morally dubious, but you want insight into how things might have been different in your world, and still might be different.

A note on music: A song needn't have words. It may convey an emotion or an abstract idea, or be associated with a person, place, or time in your character's memory. It is best to choose a song that is less than five minutes in length. You've never before heard any of the songs your counterpart sends you. If the same artist exists in your universe, they haven't made a song like this. You may send only the file or link to the song, with no additional context.

To keep track of communication in your respective timelines, pull up a timer for 107 minutes. You may also [use the soundtrack](#), which provides alerts at the listed times. You have planned your intended actions for this timeline meticulously. The instructions below have times marked for you to complete certain actions. Try to complete these actions at the time indicated in order to coordinate with your parallel self. Actions include selecting musical tracks, sending links to those tracks, composing questions, sending questions, and writing in your [lab journal](#). If you find yourself with extra time, utilize it to take additional notes on the progress of the experiment. Remember: the goal of this exchange is for you to draw wisdom from a parallel version of yourself, and to offer wisdom in return if you can.

## Instructions for communicating with another universe

To start the timer simultaneously with your counterpart, count down in The Portal from 3, 2, 1, and begin.

0:00

- Select a musical track that conveys a greeting or welcome. What is the most important thing that you want your counterpart to understand about you and your intentions in this interaction? You may want to jot down the name of the song you picked in your lab journal.

3:00

- In The Portal, send a link to your musical track.
- Listen to the musical track you receive from your counterpart. This song is a gift from another version of you. Take the time and focus to appreciate it. Maybe close your eyes.
- Take notes in your lab journal about the song you received. Write down its name. What is your

counterpart trying to tell you? What does this music make you feel? How does it compare to the initial track that you chose? What might this parallel version of you have to offer?

- Decide on a question you would like to ask your counterpart. Just one question. You may want to find out something about their situation, or ask for advice about your own. (For example, “What’s the largest concern you’re facing in your world?” or “How can I keep my loved ones safe?”) You may want to jot down the question you decided on in your lab journal.

15:00

- In The Portal, send your question.
- Read the question you receive.
- Write down the question you received in your lab journal. What is the answer? You may also want to theorize on why your counterpart has asked this question, what that means about their situation, and what kind of information or feeling you would like to convey in your response.
- Select a musical track that answers their question. Consider how it will be received, and what selection will convey the most possible meaning in a limited time.

23:00

- In The Portal, send your musical track. Listen to the musical track you receive from your counterpart.
- Take notes in your lab journal about the song you received. How might it answer the question you sent? Why did they choose this music? How does it relate to the first song they sent? Who or what does this song make you think of?
- Decide on a question you would like to ask your other self. You may want to expand on your conversation so far, or change the subject. (For example, “Why did you ask about our family?” or “What’s the most important thing you’ve learned since our realities diverged?”)

35:00

- In The Portal, send your question. Read the question you receive.
- Write down the question. What is the answer? You may also want to reflect on the subtext of

this question: what might they want to know that can’t be captured in a simple question? Does this question have anything to do with what you asked in your previous exchange?

- Select a musical track in response to their question. You may want to tailor your selection based on what you know of your counterpart so far. Or you may want to experiment with a very different stimulus.

43:00

- In The Portal, send your track. Listen to the track you receive.
- Take notes about the song. How is it useful in answering your question? What does this piece of music say about your counterpart? What can you extrapolate about their life so far? How does it compare to yours? What is happening in their world?
- Decide on a question to ask. You may want to delve deeper into a previous answer of theirs, introduce a new idea, or request assistance. (For example, “Can you tell me about your children?” or “What are you doing to survive?”)

56:00

- In The Portal, send your question. Read the question you receive.
- Write down the question you received. What is the answer? You may want to theorize on what this question means about the challenges your counterpart faces in their universe. Why are they asking these particular questions? How are they different from you? What choices have they faced that you have not?
- Select a musical track in response to their question. You may want to select a track that reveals something important about your state of mind in addition to answering the question.

63:00 (1h 3m)

- In The Portal, send your track. Listen to the track you receive.
- Take notes about the song you received. What does it mean? Are you noticing any patterns in your counterpart’s communications? What are they trying to tell you? What might they know that you don’t?

- Decide on a question to ask. You may want to ask something in response to their question, or try to get to know them better. (For example, “What would surprise me about you as you are now? or “Why are trees on your mind?”)

75:00 (1h 15m)

- In The Portal, send your question. Read the question you receive.
- Write down the question. What is the answer? You may also want to speculate on the pressures your counterpart is facing, and how you might be of assistance. What can you give them or teach them that might be useful?
- Select a musical track in response to their question. You may want to select something you think will help them in some way or fulfill a need.

80:00 (1h 20m)

- In The Portal, send your track. Listen to the track you receive.
- Take notes about the song you received. Is there a deeper message in this song? Is your counterpart successfully interpreting your questions? Do you believe you can trust them?
- Decide on a question to ask your other self. Time is running out. You should ask the important question now. The one you’ve been holding back.

92:00 (1h 32m)

- In The Portal, send your question. Read the question you receive.
- Write down the question. What is the answer? Why did they save this question until now? Why might it be important to them?
- Select a musical track in response to their question. You may want to make a particular effort to select a track that will speak to your counterpart.

97:00 (1h 37m)

- In The Portal, send your track. Listen to the track you receive.
- Take notes about the song. How is it different from what they’ve sent before? Have they come to understand you better? What kind of person is this version of you?

- The window for communication is closing. You can send only one more song. Choose one that contains your wish or hope for your other self. Something that might help them face what’s next, something that conveys what you think of them, or something you think they need to hear.

107:00 (1h 47m)

- In The Portal, send your track. Listen to the track you receive.

When the song is over, your contact with your other self is at an end. The window has closed, and you have no way to contact them again. What you have given and received will have to be enough.

Take ten minutes to record your thoughts in your lab journal. What did you learn from your counterpart? What were you able to convey to them? What did you wish you’d asked that you didn’t? What will you do with the information you obtained?

When you are finished, close your lab journal. The experiment is over, for now, and you are alone.

#### **DEBRIEF**

If desired, players can participate in a short debrief. Debriefing is optional. Players can take turns answering the following questions (or not) as the mood strikes.

- What is one word that describes your current state?
- Share a moment in the game you found exciting, interesting, or meaningful.
- How did you decide what music to use in your communications? Did that process change in the course of the game?
- Do you use music to communicate in your everyday life? If so, how?
- If you could send a song as a message to anyone in the universe, what song would you send and to whom?

Thank you for playing *Voyagers*.

## Appendix A:

### Ways the world could change

This list is meant to provide inspiration for an event that changed your character's world. The divergence you choose need not be listed here. For extra fun, consider picking an item from this list that you were pretty sure was going to come to pass in the last year.

- Alien invasion
- Artificial intelligence gains sentience
- Asteroid impact
- Bio-terrorist action
- Capitalists return means of production to the people
- Catastrophic acceleration of climate change
- Civil war
- Cloud dragons destroy atmosphere
- Conjunction with fey realms
- Divine intervention
- Dolphins develop thumbs
- Ecological Collapse
- Empathy renaissance: all humans learn to value each other
- Global financial market meltdown
- Global pandemic
- Honeybee colony collapse
- Interplanetary contamination
- Magic returns
- Mass mutation
- Meddling time travelers
- Murder hornets
- Non-linear time progression
- Nuclear war
- Overlord (benevolent)
- Overlord (evil)
- Overlord (indifferent)
- Power grid failure
- Rich eaten by revolutionaries
- Reproductive failure
- Robot uprising
- Societal collapse (other)
- Supertsunami
- Supervolcano eruption
- Takeover by religious fundamentalists
- The rapture
- Werewolves
- Wildfire
- Zombies

## Appendix B: Variations

### Four or Six player variation

It is possible to play *Voyagers* with more than two people. In this case, complete the "early years" all together. You are all playing a single base character. In the "divergence" section, each player should complete their own individual events and consequences. During gameplay, players should be paired up so they are always exchanging messages with the same person. For example, A and B would send messages to each other, C and D to each other, and E and F to each other.

### Images variation

The Voyager Golden Record contained images in addition to audio selections. It is possible to play *Voyagers* with images instead of songs. Note that you should select one medium or the other for players to use: not both. Additional guidelines apply:

- Take some time pre-game to prepare sources for images to more easily find what you're looking for during the game. You may decide to allow personal images (photographs or previously created original artwork) or found images only. Do not create images on the spot for communication; use only what already exists in your universe.
- Spend approximately the same amount of time contemplating the image you receive as you would a song. Consider the aesthetics of it as an object as well as examining it for meaning.
- Images must not contain text (or a small enough amount of text that the main impact of the image is still visual rather than linguistic)